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SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: EU MAY ACT TO BAN BELARUSIAN SPORTS MINISTER FROM OLYMPICS

REF: A. STATE 159971

1B. THE HAGUE 1880

Classified By: USEU POLOFF LEE LITZENBERGER; REASONS 1.4 (B,D)

¶1. (C) Summary. The EU is looking seriously at steps it can take to ban Belarusian Sports Minister Sivakov from the Olympic games. Greece supports a ban, but wants to approach the International Olympic Committee first, as visas are issued along with IOC credentials, and Sivakov is likely to appeal to the IOC should his visa be denied. The EU also plans to approach the GOB in Minsk to dissuade Sivakov from traveling to Athens. Finally, assuming the IOC will go along with a ban, the EU could take action as early as August 3, based on Minsk's failure to investigate several politically motivated disappearances reported in the "Pourgerides Report" in May. At the time the report was released, the EU said it might consider further actions if the GOB did not investigate; the report cited Sivakov and two other GOB ministers as being implicated. The EU ban would be on all three ministers. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Despite earlier indications that the EU would not move to bar Belarusian Sports and Tourism Minister Sivakov from the summer Olympics, the EU is now seriously considering taking action. According to the Council's acting Belarus desk officer, Carl Hallergard, the EU's Political and Security Committee (PSC) held a lengthy discussion of the issue on July 29.

Greece supports a ban; but notes IOC wrinkle

¶3. (C) Greece supports a ban, but noted that visas for ministers are issued as part of the accreditation they receive from the International Olympic Committee (IOC). Belarus would likely appeal any action by Greece to cancel or deny a visa directly to the IOC. Therefore, Greece plans to approach the IOC in coming days to see if the IOC would support a visa denial for Sivakov. Greece hopes to have a response by the time of the PSC's next meeting on August 3. Other EU member states are free also to approach the IOC on this issue over the next few days. (Comment. Presumably, the US and other non-EU states could do likewise; doing so would add weight to the argument for a ban. End Comment.)

Moral dissuasion

¶4. (C) The EU also plans to approach the GOB informally in an attempt to dissuade Sivakov from attending the Olympics, regardless of whether the EU succeeds in denying him a visa. (Comment. Here again, the US could consider making a parallel approach in Minsk, coordinated with EU missions there. End Comment.)

Some Members oppose a ban, but EU may have found a way...

¶5. (C) Hallergard said that while some member states oppose a specific ban preventing Sivakov from traveling to the Olympics, arguing that this is an issue for Greece to decide, PSC Ambassadors have found an alternative means to achieve the same goal. On May 14, the EU issued a statement on the so-called "Pourgerides Report" on disappearances in Belarus. The statement cited three Belarusian ministers -- including Sivakov -- as being implicated, and included a warning that the EU would consider further action if the GOB did not investigate the disappearances. The GOB has done nothing, and now PSC Ambassadors may be prepared to institute a ban on the three ministers cited in the report; this would prevent Sivakov from traveling to Athens.

If all else fails, Sivakov won't be allowed to mingle

¶6. (C) Greece also informed the PSC that, even if Sivakov is able to travel to Athens, the GOB has decided not to invite him to the two ceremonial events where he would have an opportunity to mingle with other dignitaries: at the VIP Tribunal for the opening ceremonies; and at the reception following the opening that will be hosted by the Greek President.

Timeline

17. (C) The EU could act as quickly as next week; but much depends on the position of the IOC. If the IOC will not dispute with Greece a visa denial, prospects are good that the PSC will impose a ban next week on Sivakov and the two other ministers named in the Pourgerides report.

SAMMIS